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## Between Reconciliation and the Reactivation of Past Conflicts in Europe: Rethinking Social Memory Paradigms

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**Abstract:** Europe is grounded, from all sides, in traces of old inter-state and ethnic conflicts. Experience has proved that they can still be re-activated in spite of various forms of resolution in the past. History is welcome in the present, and we can observe mobilisation among agents, populations of victims, or despoiled groups, which have been forgotten or forced into silence through post-conflictual issues. Various interest groups, political parties, or states, build up memorial resources that they incorporate in their actions list of historicist strategies, with the aim of 'recycling' the representations of the symbolic pasts into contemporary political games. These mobilisations meet the reconciliation trends coming from society (for example, informal groups, NGOs, and so on), or are taken in charge by national and international institutions – which are becoming more and more routine – especially under the influence of the circulation of 'good' models of the pacification of resentments, containing a highly normative tone. The question is to know whether, in spite of the apparent heterogeneity of this phenomenon, the historicist games do constitute a common indicator of the state of political regimes, especially democracies, and also of the strength of that supranational construction called the EU. This question necessitates the revisiting of the dominant concepts in the field of the political sociology of memory. The international circulation of reconciliation grammars, and the fact that memory issues are being torn out of their national frameworks and exploited in several arenas, both internal and external, in order to increase their yield of political resources, are further evidence that the paradigms heretofore dominant in the social sciences are now at an impasse.

**Keywords:** Sociology and paradigms of memory, uses of history, Europeanisation of politics of history, post-communism, institutions of remembrance, grammars of reconciliation, Central Europe

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*Time is a strong pain-killer; it sometimes gives the wounded man the impression that his wound has healed for all time. But suddenly, fifteen or twenty years later and for no apparent reason, the wound reopens, causing what may be unbearable suffering, before going numb again, freeing thought from its embrace.*

Sandor Marai, *Les confessions d'un bourgeois*

*There are times when History reminds me of a theatre storeroom where costumes for very different plays are kept. We tend to bring them out according to the needs of the moment.*

Henryk Samsonowicz, Polish historian

The end of communism in Eastern Europe worked to renew debates on history – namely European history – and reactivated social memory issues. The correlation with the European Union integration process had its own galvanising effect. The uses made of Europe went beyond learning the *acquis communautaire* and interacting with institutional actors. The window of opportunity offered by the pre-enlargement transition period was filled with intense symbolic activity both inside and outside the countries, activity involving several categories of actor. And once the countries had joined the Union, hitherto unknown memory problematics erupted in the enlarged EU space. The new member countries challenge us to take on their heritage of social memory issues: ‘Yes to Europe’, wrote Maria Janion [2000], a historian of Polish Romanticism, ‘but we’re coming in with our dead’.

### **The recurrence and diversity of social memory phenomena in Europe**

The EU space has been enriched with new concerns. It now encompasses memory issues other than those that rotate around the ‘axis’ of Germany, though they are still dominant. Europe has become a theatre of recurring ‘memorial’ movements that are striking out all over, from North to South and East to West, and this development persists despite (or perhaps because of) the EU’s routine policy of encouraging reconciliation acts and arrangements. The Union’s juridical-normative policies undoubtedly act as a safety valve, periodically relieving excessive pressure, but they also offer increased visibility to the actors handling the conflicts and dissent resulting from the reactivation and re-evaluation of historical ‘files’ that seemed definitively closed. The most striking example is the German Association of Expellees from Poland and the Czech Republic. Their purpose is to get the 1945 expulsions recognised as cases of ‘ethnic cleansing’ as defined for the former Yugoslavia. This amounts to demanding revision of the verdicts produced in quite another context, that is, the victory over the Nazi occupiers [Blaive and Mink 2003]. Moves such as this to reposition a ‘painful’ past using norms produced for other situations and events involve a strategy of *historical de-contextualisation*.

The early 2000s have also witnessed the return to centre stage of population categories sacrificed earlier by the exit 'pacts' of their authoritarian regimes; for example, victims of Franco in Spain, and victims of the communist political police in post-communist countries. These groups are composed of post-conflict generations who feel an imperative to repair the injustice done. Their aim is to rehabilitate groups excluded from memorial pacts, those who had to keep quiet about their resentment (but not forget it!) so that the authoritarian regime could make its exit compromises.

When perpetrators of political mass murders, often themselves in power, seek to 'efface the traces' of that crime, we are dealing with extreme forms of history and memory 'manipulation'. This applies to certain countries of former Yugoslavia. Such manipulations have the effect of extending the crime after life has returned to 'normal'. They take innumerable forms, such as producing falsified accounts of the events in question, destroying evidence, prohibiting access to or destroying archives, repressing or eliminating witnesses, instating censorship and criminalising anyone who produces a dissident account.

On the institutional side, arrangements have been developed in many European countries, Eastern as well as Western and Southern, to bring together former enemies and produce reconciliation. More generally, a 'grammar' of norms and rules has been developed for handling post-conflict situations. These norms and rules are indissociable from memory issues. A brief overview provides a glimpse of the number and diversity of situations and solutions: managing the consequences of armed conflicts (former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland), putting an end to authoritarian regimes (Southern Europe, Central and Eastern Europe), putting an end to bilateral heritage conflicts (England/Ireland, Germany/Czech Republic, Germany/Poland, Poland/Ukraine, Italy/Slovenia, Greece/Turkey, for example.). The arrangements put in place for handling these 'painful pasts' are likewise extremely heterogeneous, ranging from bilateral commissions of historians to professionalised peace-keeping activities, and including such solutions as specific museum projects or intervention in international arenas (Council of Europe, OSCE, European Union). This institutional density is sometimes interpreted as proof that history, and history as mediated by memory, have been abandoned in Europe in favour of legal and administrative regulation. As I see it what is actually happening is that partisan memory games are intensifying in an overall context of the judicialisation and criminalisation of individuals and groups responsible for violence.<sup>1</sup>

In some states recently, history has begun to be used explicitly as a governing instrument. Here the aim is not to improve bilateral relations and the European Union construction – as was the case of the Mitterrand-Kohl couple's usage

<sup>1</sup> The French philosopher Alain Finkelkraut expresses a similar understanding when he calls for denouncing a Europe that 'has to define itself by law; that is, by ... potentially universal juridical norms, because it cannot define itself historically' [Finkelkraut 2006].

of their countries' conflictual past [Rosoux 2001] – but rather to mobilise the electorate of a given party or coalition around what may be described as symbolic yet bellicose identity demands, demands made both in the internal political arena and to the world at large. In Poland, for example, the political right has begun to speak of 'historical policy' and intends to make such policy – which it claims has been neglected until now by the 'successors' of the Old Regime (the insinuation being that those successors are 'accomplices to the crimes of the past')<sup>2</sup> – a constituent component of its public policy.

Up against the proliferating use of conflictual symbolic pasts, Europe (the EU) offers its model of peaceful co-existence among former enemies. But in seeking to absolutise peace through consensus, well-meaning European politicians have often simply deferred recollection of the conflicts in question by one or two generations. By integrating memory of the historical-political past into the routine canons of democracy, they have indeed limited or neutralised the risk that the *violence* of those heritages will return. But the problem with reconciliationism – in Europe as elsewhere – is that everything seems to have been arranged to make it possible to get out of conflict impasses and construct democracy but nothing has been put in place to prevent or soothe later competitive struggles between the actors in question. To better grasp the sociological issues involved in these transformations, we first have to redefine the concepts common to the various areas in which reconciliation policies are applied, and then analyse the games the actors play.

### Redefining concepts of and approaches to social memory games<sup>3</sup>

The range of different developments in the area of social memory in Europe shows that at some point in time actors will re-enact historicisation strategies; that is, strategies for historicising conflict-generating heritages. The aim of these strategies may be to produce consensus (pacification of social relations) or, on the contrary, to reopen certain aspects of a repressed history (here the aim is to obtain distinction, symbolic recognition, and integration into national narratives); it may also be to escape responsibility for crimes by 'erasing the traces of a criminal past'.

<sup>2</sup> Not wishing to be surpassed on this point, the Polish political left opted for a parade that would have approximately the same tone: 'We must have our own historical policy', wrote the leader of the Democratic Left Alliance, Wojciech Olejniczak (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 7 November 2006). 'It seems that history in Poland today is the exclusive property of the right. The left must not let itself be paralysed by this ... It must recall all that is worthy and important in its tradition ... In politics in general we speak of the past while thinking of the present and the future.'

<sup>3</sup> Roughly speaking, the French academic field of memory studies is dominated by three paradigms that correspond to three different disciplinary approaches. First, there is the

The concept of historicisation strategies is crucial to understanding memory issues and the behaviour of the actors involved, together with institutional diversity. This is a variant of symbolic politics; the underlying conviction is that certain 'representations' of historical facts, internalised through socialisation that is either formal (schooling, for example) or informal (within the family), have the collective mobilisation potential required for getting the group using the strategy the political influence it desires.

What is the point here? History as scholarly facts or remembered ones has always been used to legitimate or de-legitimate. And recently we have been seeing a wave of memory-centred social movements (sometimes qualified as 'revisionist' and always involving a 'revisiting' of the knowledge that has been acquired by historical science) that call into question the established legitimacy of certain memory representations, namely those pertaining to the Second World War [Losurdo 1996; Kopeček 2008]. This is due to a number of factors, including the end of the great ideological interpretation systems, systems which allowed

psychoanalysis-tinged philosophical approach, developed primarily by Paul Ricoeur. This approach distinguishes between 'clinical and ... therapeutic categories borrowed principally from psychoanalysis' and 'forms of the manipulation or instrumentalisation of memory, within the framework of a critique of ideology' [Ricoeur 2000: 83] – what Ricoeur calls abuses of memory and forgetting. Finally, there is the dimension that the author himself designates as 'explicitly ethico-political', the only one he approves of: the duty of memory. He covers the whole 'path from one level to the next ... from one figure to the next characterising the uses and abuses of memory, from *blocked* memory to *forced* memory, passing through *manipulated* memory' [Ricoeur 2000: 83]. The second paradigm, which belongs to sociological tradition and is chronologically first, is Maurice Halbwachs' '*cadres sociaux de la mémoire*' (social frames of memory) [1994 [1925], 1997 [1950]], an approach later refined by its critics, particularly Roger Bastide [1960] and more recently Marie-Claude Lavabre [2000]. The key concepts here are 'collective memory', group memory, and the social frames of memory. Emphasis is on social conditions for the elaboration and transmission of memory representations that create group cohesion. The third paradigm is used in the discipline of history and is directly linked to the name of Pierre Nora and the immense collective work he directed, *Les lieux de mémoire* [1984] (translated into English as *Realms of Memory*, 1997). With regard to these three traditional paradigms or approaches, we can make the following paradoxical observation: there have never been as many social science studies of memory, and yet a great number of memory phenomena cannot be explained by any of these approaches. The normative European framework for resolving the after-effects of conflictual pasts on social memory actually exacerbates this paradox. The proliferation of memory issues that are correlated either with a desire to reach reconciliation after a violent inter-state or inter-ethnic conflict or, on the contrary, to reopen a historical file and change or at least challenge the verdict and, more generally, to make use of the conflictual past in today's political contests, points up the necessity of trying to find a new explanatory paradigm. The international circulation of reconciliation grammars, and the fact that memory issues are being torn out of their national frameworks and exploited in several arenas, both internal and external, in order to increase their yield of political resources, are further evidence that the paradigms heretofore dominant in the social sciences are now at an impasse. For more on the different uses of memory, see also G. Mink and L. Neumayer [2007].

for clear, seemingly immutable identification of victims and persecutors, winners and losers, and the dual temptation to make the victims of both sides equal and develop new historical categories and rankings. The various moves to rewrite history are very closely linked to the arrival on the scene of subsequent generations as well as the 'archives revolution': the opening of archives in post-communist Europe (some without official consent or regulation) and more generally, the new availability of archive material as prescribed inaccessibility periods come to an end. All this is being done in a fluid context in which behaviour and values are proliferating that threaten to call into question the dominant understanding that democracy has become definitively universal. In general, that vision is being given a rough time, here by the eruption of unconventional behaviour; there by assaults on the continuity of historical legitimation; elsewhere by the rise of xenophobic discourses and movements. Criticism and heretofore unmentionable subjects of debate – repressed until now, prohibited or censured – are cropping up all over. Those who are speaking out in these instances show a superb indifference to the standard, routine frameworks of representation, negotiation and political legality. An increasing number of firmly rooted national politicians who have acquired legitimacy at the polls in democratic contests are giving in to the temptation to make high-risk anti-democratic speeches and statements. And new categories of actors are alternately playing system and anti-system games, struggling thereby to call into question the historical foundations of political systems by changing people's representations of those systems. These actors are taking advantage of the many scheduled national elections – and, for broader European issues, of the growth-related and functional difficulties the European Union is having – to make themselves heard.<sup>4</sup>

If we want to make sense of the strong rise in historicisation discourse, we need to go beyond the discipline of history. While historians express amazement at the fragility of their field and the recent incursions into their professional monopoly [Hartog and Revel 2003], what this new situation requires above all is the analytic insight of political specialists, sociologists, and jurists. Because behind the prolific talk about History, what is really at issue is not History (an account

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<sup>4</sup> The Armenian diaspora, for example, has been trying for nearly ninety years to sensitise international opinion to the early 20th-century massacre of Armenians and have it qualified as a crime – with mixed results. Suddenly, Europe has begun to show more interest. Memory of this mass murder has been reactivated by the increased profitability of using it in the context of the polemic around admission of Turkey to the EU. Similarly, Ukrainians have always preserved the memory of the Great Famine, but up until now the geopolitical context was not propitious to reactivating that memory. Why is it being reactivated now? Simply because this move fits with the confrontation between Ukrainians in favour of a Europeanised Ukraine, namely, the supporters of President Viktor Yuchenko, and the supporters of Viktor Yanukovich, who are loyal to Russia. Kiev's historicisation strategy of evoking and denouncing this tragic episode is hardly to Russia's liking because it works to mobilise voters against the pro-Russian candidate.

constructed in compliance with a number of pre-established rules shared ideally by all members of the historians' corporation) but rather uses of representations of history, and the new actors who are developing and enacting those uses. The idea of the return of the past, the belated return to certain painful pasts thought to have been 'obliterated', raises more questions for a political specialist than a historian, as shown by the example of France's supposed 'forgetting' of Vichy for several decades after 1945. Annie Collovald explains: 'This episode of French political history has always been present in the social uses of various actors with an interest in how it was interpreted – historians and politicians – because from the outset it constituted an intellectual and practical resource for defining their position and supporting their reading of national history' [Collovald 2006]. This seems an obvious point, and we may ask if it is not due to the fact that forgetting, too, is a strategy, whether conscious or not, as Régine Robin [2002] put it; as is pointing a finger at certain actors for having worked to efface historical facts from social memory. Paul Ricoeur [2000] recognises the existence of strategies of forgetting (omission, negligence, blindness) but understands them as involving 'the class of non-action'. The main weakness of typologies that combine psychoanalysis and hermeneutics is that they accentuate memory 'invisibility' and repression ('obliteration' in Ricoeur's typology [2000]) almost as if they were the equivalent of inaction on the part of memory: 'In this way action is prevented from continuing by forgetting' [ibid.: 653]. The fact is that memory material that has been 'forced into silence' continues to be part of actors' games even if, in the current situation, the only places it can survive are the memory niches cultivated by particular, minority actors. Those who are forced to forget and those who force others to forget keep the memory games going by using the constraint of silence itself to create a new space of interaction opportunities.

The 'blank page', an extreme form of 'obliteration' historicising strategy (a sort of anti-history or anti-memory), involves the violent or surreptitious amputation of a piece of collective history and the memory reflecting that history. As mentioned, this is practised by criminals in an attempt to clear their names and escape being investigated and punished for their crimes. Behind these ways of proceeding are powerful actors, often state office-holders, who use coercive means to impose their law and legitimacy. At times the constraint of preventing people from memorising something – particularly as practised by the Argentine torturers of the Mechanical Naval School of Buenos Aires, who permanently blindfolded their victims during detention, then transformed the torture spaces to make it impossible for the investigation commission to investigate – is countered by 'memory of the invisible'. The smells or sounds of a place – olfactory and aural memory – often replace visual memory and allow torture and disappearance policy survivors to reconstitute the material aspects of the violence they were subjected to and thereby help museographers create a monument for socialising memory.

Historicising strategies, then, play an important role in regulating the behaviour, choices and arrangements developed by institutions. Behind memory



games and the development of arrangements for handling post-conflict periods, all of which produce complex actor networks, actors are increasingly likely to use representations of the past, especially if that past is conflictual. We should ask, of course, how profitable such strategic choices are, but profitability is hard to measure given that actors make their choices empirically, as a function of the profit and rewards they think they can expect. Their moves are aimed to procure them a better political position, an election victory; to designate and stigmatise the enemy, strengthen their client relations, consolidate identity referents, etc. Their choices will necessarily correspond to timely situational contexts that will increase the probability of attaining their goals.

We have seen how a context of conditionality, which holds out to secondary political actors the prospect of making a breakthrough, may annihilate long, painstaking efforts to achieve reconciliation. The example of Germany and its neighbours is emblematic here. It sounds paradoxical, but what rewound the historical clock in the centre of Europe was the context of eastward enlargement. In the West, meanwhile, the rewriting of history was induced by collective mobilisations and interactions among politicians. The competition around memory and the associated spiral of intemperate statements (in 2002 the Czech Prime Minister Miloš Zeman went so far as to dub the Sudeten Germans a 'Fifth Column') became manifest in the heart of Central Europe in the quadrilateral formed by Austria, Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland; it was then taken up in Hungary and Slovakia. The agitation is persisting throughout the first decade of the 21st century and the end is nowhere in sight, despite the fact that all the countries involved are now EU members.

After 1945, the dominant dogma was the one imposed by the victorious states. To guarantee lasting peace in Europe, they authorised the displacement of German and Hungarian minorities – as well as a Polish minority, which sometimes goes unmentioned. The point was to create mono-ethnic national entities. After 1989 and the break-up of Yugoslavia, with its succession of exterminations and ethnically based expulsions, and given the founding principles of the European Union – namely, respect for the rights of minorities to live in peace wherever they have resided for a long time – that dogma became obsolete.

In Central Europe, in 2001–2002 the first sign of the conflict was pressure to invalidate the 'Beneš Decrees', a legal expulsion act, and a symbol of the hardships of the German and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia. The episodes of this painful history, cultivated by minorities who up until then could not be heard, were suddenly projected into the glare of current events, or even more paradoxically, they actually became news. At the time, the development was seen as merely a bout of local fever, facilitated by the contradictory ways of handling History within Czechoslovakia. But everything changed with the firing up of German-Polish passions on the same issue. The dykes put up earlier to contain this source of conflict have all burst, and the issue has spread geographically throughout Central Europe. The conflict has crystallised around the desire of the expelled

group to find its place in the collective memory of the last years of the war, with a project for a museum in Berlin, a centre for expellees. But memory pressure has not stopped there. In December 2006, the Association of East Prussians, made up of former landowners in the region of Pomerania, filed 22 petitions with the European Human Rights Court in Strasbourg to recover property confiscated in 1945. In response, a number of Poles formed an association to demand a revision of the Polish-German treaty of 1991 that would include a clause protecting their ownership rights for the contested properties. We sense in the judicialised aggressiveness on both sides a will to reposition themselves and their identities and to redistribute quantities of political influence. The two extremes are both seeking to draw maximum political profit from this interaction.

The agitation of the memory of expelled Germans – the historicising strategy being, as explained, to ‘de-contextualise’ what happened to them, extracting it from its historical context; namely the crushing of the Nazi armies – amounts to dissociating the causes and effects of the war. And it constitutes proof that what, from 1960 to 1990, seemed a definitive, stable balance of power, attained by means of a moral or normative approach to the conflictual past in the form of pardon and reconciliation policies, is in fact subject to fluctuation as a function of the political situation of the moment. An ‘asymmetrical’ balance of power – even if that balance seems frozen – is in itself a resource that can be seized at an opportune moment; that is, a moment when it appears profitable to recycle the past. This is clearly attested by the move to present certain episodes of controversial history as scandals, and by the spiralling of memory issues around the 1933–1945 German heritage.

Impending EU enlargement was the occasion that enabled a particular category of politician to spring to life, politicians who simultaneously play by the system and against it, who are both for and against democracy. Examples are Jörg Haider in Austria, Andrzej Lepper in Poland, István Csurka in Hungary, and Erika Steinbach in Germany. These politicians all seized the opportunity offered by national uncertainty about being admitted to the Union to reawaken memory of old disputes and the historical metaphors characterising them. The act of blackmail that consisted in threatening to block European enlargement was a major issue in the period of unilateral conditionality imposed by the EEC/EU on countries wishing to join. It is true that these politicians’ political longevity depended on that of their political strategies. Still, this historicising game, which called for repairing a past injustice (or stopping short of committing one by taking account of the past), aimed to capitalise on a diffuse feeling of frustration present in the memory of mobilisable populations ready to manifest that feeling [Mink 2005].

The current situation also requires us to reflect on the knowledge acquired by sociology of memory. It seems to me that the widely accepted distinction in sociology between historical memory and ‘live’ memory [Lavabre 1996] needs to be supplemented. What we are trying to investigate here is in fact ‘reactive’ memory, in the sense that the actors who promote historicising strategies are aim-

ing to achieve political effects by 'recycling' profitable memorised material (profitable in that it is socialised and emotionally charged) in reaction to situations of uncertainty and conditionality. What interests me in collective memory, defined as the 'point of intersection between a set of representations of the past shared by individuals (memories and acquired knowledge) and seemingly definitive accounts of history – i.e. historical memory (as distinct from the science of history)' [Lavabre 1996] – is its capacity to be reactivated and invested with current issues. This means that the past only counts if it is in some way relevant for the strategies of present-day actors. In this connection the Polish intellectual Adam Michnik speaks of the 'selfishness of pain', selfishness that works to underline certain episodes of the lived past with a glaring highlighter while others go unnoticed. Here we encounter a typology recently applied in international relations studies [Rosoux 2001], distinguishing between the weight of the past (the past that people were subjected to) and the choice of a past (the past used to political ends). This is a useful distinction, but the dichotomy loses its effectiveness if we take into account the fact that the reason we choose to focus on certain components of the past is precisely because they weigh so heavily. People choose a certain past in order to use it and to profit by doing so [Stora 2002].

The diversity of actors who have appeared in connection with social memory, and more importantly their marked connections to partisan politics, move us to examine the individuals who have chosen to become involved in such political contests. They use the symbolic past to confront their political competitors and succeed against them. In this category, which ranges from party leaders and activists and includes elected officials (including members of parliament), journalists and judges, what we observe, curiously enough, is the increasing influence of a profession that we usually situate elsewhere; namely, historians, or rather a historian subgroup: militant historians. Militant historians no longer feel any inhibitions about being partisan or citing partisan filiation. A number of professional historians are using the resources of their status to partisan ends. In fact, they deliberately use their hybrid status to increase the profitable impact of their historicising strategies, combining their academic job with the legitimacy of their work in the archives, their status as experts, etc. This is also characteristic of the generation gap within the historian corporation, namely in post-communist Europe. For the young 'knights' of historical moralisation the only thing that counts is facts (behaviour), if possible attested by archives. They are not interested in the context of the facts. And it matters little who compiled the archive – even if it was compiled by the persecutors and their accomplices, namely, the regime agents in charge of informing on particular individuals. As the authors of the police reports, the second set is granted the same status as professional academic historians, and in some cases their opinions actually supplant those of the professionals. Factual and research accounts or investigations that are in any way complex are rejected: a traitor is a traitor; a hero a hero. This attitude, meant to be perceived as cool and objective, is nonetheless rooted in moral convictions. Some historians,

above all members of the pre-1989 generation, try to extricate themselves from memory games by citing their scholarship and scholarly approach. Yet those historians, too, willingly or not, are playing the memory game, if only through their epistemological concern to protect their professional field in the name of its monopoly on historical 'truth' (the code of ethics) or its protocol of methodological rules (the epistemological code) [Pomian 2006].

Our immediate concern here, memory issues in the framework of the European Union, requires another conceptual inflection. Everywhere in Europe there are *lieux de mémoire* [Nora 1984; Brossat et al. 1990]. It is precisely these *lieux* – places – that are being reactivated today to enable people to recover or discover identity touchstones. But sometimes the reactivation proceeds by dividing, reopening 'wounds' in the name of a need for distinction, and sometimes, on the contrary, through moves to prevent division by applying a dynamic, vigorous therapy of reconciliation and pardon. In both cases, fossilised, fixed places of memory become live resource reservoirs, a point of departure for new initiatives (pertaining to reactive memory) whose purpose is to modify social reality and the settings in which those initiatives are staged. Because these 'places' are in fact dynamic, it might be preferable to speak of 'veins' or 'seams' of memory (the author's term is *gisement mémoriel*), as of a mineral resource in a mine – a concept not inconsistent with the concept of places of memory. The terms designate a symbol around which memory can rally, rather than a specific place. For the Polish-Ukrainian conflict of the 1940s there is Volhynia (a region that was the site of Polish massacres), and the 'Vistula action', a synonym for the massacre and displacement of Ukrainians by Poles. Germans and Poles have their eyes trained on Silesia and Pomerania; Czechs and Germans on the Sudeten area. However, texts such as the Beneš or the Bierut decrees,<sup>5</sup> legal bases for population transfers, can also be rallying points for memory. For rightist parties in post-communist democracies, the 'roundtable talks' at the close of the communist period are an inexhaustible vein of *dissensus* resources, despite the fact that they are attached to no particular geographical place. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact also functions as a reservoir of useful references for anti-Soviet actors. Various actors draw the symbolic material required for fuelling political contests from just such 'territorial or extra-territorial imaginaries'.

The fact that the European Union construction process itself has been conducted under the sign of reconciliation constitutes a prescription for homogenisation. In reality, the reconciliationist impulses are being contested by multiple actors. The pull of the universal can actually be used as a resource for creating division and heterogeneity. Wanting to get one's own collective identity heritage incorporated into the historical heritage of Europe in the name of its universality (see the debate on giving special mention to 'Christian roots' in the preamble to the European Union Constitutional Treaty) may have the unsought and unde-

<sup>5</sup> Named for Boleslaw Bierut, secretary general of the Polish Communist Party until 1953.

sired effect of *renationalising* memory. In any case, the space of Europe (the EU and beyond) is run through with a multitude of stagings of conflictual memories, memories around which multiform actors compete. We can now analyse the reasons for this, while inventorying the new developments.

### **Divided Europe's past: a resource for memory adjustment strategies**

The symbol rather than the historical fact of the 'Yalta betrayal' is part of reactive Eastern European memory, and politicians in Central Europe seem to consider recycling it a profitable proposition. This explains why one last semantic polemic around Europe's 'painful' past developed at the time the eight post-communist countries were joining the EU-15. Central Europeans and their symbolic spokespersons expressed opposition to the European lexicon traditionally used for the circumstance: Was it not more appropriate to speak of unification than enlargement? For former dissidents such as Bronislaw Geremek or Václav Havel, this was a kind of gallant last stand, the last opportunity to display the obstination that had characterised them throughout the period of technocratic negotiation imposed by Brussels. They recalled the 'historical debt' owed to their part of the continent, claiming that their 'return to Europe' was legitimate reparation for the Western sin of Yalta.<sup>6</sup> The Central European countries had constructed a strategy around the West's 'debt' to the East in order to increase pressure on the EU and create a demand for memory adjustment and compensatory reparation. To increase the profitability of this strategy they wagered on the apparent opposition between present-day 'norms' and historical 'values'; the clear intention was to make the West feel guilty. Throughout the negotiation period, insistent use was made of the debt argument. In February 2001 a Eurosceptic Polish newspaper denounced 'highly insufficient EU compensation for what Poland did for Europe beginning in 1920' (*Nasz Dziennik*, 19 February, 2001). The point was to recall the role the Poles had played in holding off the Red Army as it strove to realise Lenin's goal of exporting Bolshevik revolution westward. Some historians were more circumspect. Janusz Tazbir noted with irony: 'History in Poland ... has not been a mere science of the past but a sort of bill we wave under Europe's nose. An unpaid bill?' (*Tygodnik Powszechny*, 26 July 1998).

This example illustrates how East European actors seized and deployed the opportunities available to them – first in the period preceding EU integration, then after 1 May 2004 – by means of national-international scale games. Historicising strategies can be used in several of the international arenas where European-scope norms of symbolic recognition and reconciliation are defined.

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<sup>6</sup> Asked in an interview with the French daily *Libération* whether 'we can speak of the "reunification" of Europe in connection with Union enlargement', the historian Jacques Le Goff answered in no uncertain terms: 'Europe never was united' (*Libération*, 3 May 2004: 6).

Those strategies bring their protagonists a double reward: recognised status in the international arena and patriotic legitimacy 'at home'.

Several memory-related 'causes' of unequal weight were deliberately introduced into European-level arenas. The following survey shows considerable variation in the results of this strategy.

On the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Gdansk Social Accords and the birth of the free *Solidarnosc* union, the Poles demanded that August 31 be declared 'European Solidarity Day' and figure as such on the European Parliament calendar. These demands were met. But intentional historicising actions run into all the stumbling blocks of rational choice; they can be thrown off course or prove counterproductive in unforeseen ways. The 60th anniversary of the Hungarian insurrection in Budapest, crushed by the Red Army, offered the Hungarians an opportunity to stand up to Western Europe as the most legitimate victim of all the countries subjected to communist rule. The opportunity was especially rich given that at the time, France and Great Britain had bartered indifference and inaction in response to the Soviet crackdown on the Hungarian liberation movement for Soviet silence on their battle for the Suez Canal; they could therefore be made to feel some shame. Moreover, a few of the former communist satellites were under the influence of powerful communist parties busy disseminating the myth of Soviet humanism. Dozens of conferences were organised, from Brussels to Warsaw by way of Paris and London; embassies were active in the cause, and in Hungary's case, so was the state. Given the fact that at almost exactly the same time, European officials were pushing hard in the European Parliament and the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) to get the communist regime condemned and equated with Hitler's, Hungary's memory game should have reaped it exceptional profits. As it happened, however, in autumn 2006 the same reference to 1956 was being used as a resource in a partisan left-right contest in the national Hungarian arena, at just the moment the left-centre-left coalition in power had been weakened by the Socialist prime minister's admission – made off the record in a closed meeting, but recorded on tape and later leaked to the public – that his government had lied to the Hungarian people. The Hungarian right and far right acted out the events of 1956 in the street in front of the Parliament, thereby appropriating a historic and apparently consensual date – and discrediting the left. This in turn partially deprived Hungary of the returns they had sought from their external or extra-national movement. Just as counter-productive was the historicising action undertaken by the Poles in 2005 in connection with a painful episode in Polish-Russian relations. On March 7 of that year, Polish MEPs asked EU Parliament president Josep Borrell for a minute's silence to commemorate the 1940 Stalin-ordered Red Army massacre of Polish army officers at Katyn. The MEPs had decided to observe a minute of silence for the victims of the terrorist bombing in Madrid (anniversary March 11), but the Polish request was rejected on the grounds that there should not be too many commemorations. At that point, the representative of the Polish MEPs Jacek Saryusz Wolski made the following, highly significant remark:

'We have to educate Western Europe. We can't tolerate this historical amnesia.' He then confirmed that the demand was part of a vaster memory adjustment strategy: 'All MEPs from former Eastern countries, whatever their political group, demand a debate .... We think it's important to recall that for half of the continent, the defeat of Nazi Germany signified the start of communist occupation.' During the 60th anniversary commemorations of the end of the Second World War, the historicising game of appropriating the victory over the Nazis (see, for example, the controversy around the day the war ended: May 8 for Western Europe, May 9 for the Russians) clearly showed how greatly representations of the year 1945 vary as we move from Moscow to Warsaw to Riga to Berlin to London. They also demonstrated that this anniversary remains a legitimisation card in geopolitical competition, and is also used to activate identity reflexes, pro- or anti-Russian, depending on the country. The East-West memory split here eroded and undermined partisan solidarity – as did the proposed 'Yalta resolution' meant to commemorate the end of the war. Martin Schultz, president of the Socialist group in the European Parliament, had a run-in on the point with his Estonian Socialist comrade Toomas Ilves. Schultz recalled that 'the Red Army made it possible to defeat Nazism and end the Shoah', while Ilves regretted the fact that there were 'two visions of History', for 'Westerners did not suffer as we did behind the Iron Curtain'. The Socialist group was neatly split between 'old Europe' and 'new Europe'; the divisive power of the Iron Curtain continues to exist in minds and memory.

The unity of memory policy – a type of policy Europe has a penchant for – falls apart when symbols of the (ideological) partisan past are reconnected to the partisan present; here the line of separation once again reflects the left/right split. This was observable for PACE resolutions condemning the totalitarian, crime-generating character of communism. The 2005 report by Göran Lindblad of the European People's Party (EPP), approved on 25 January 2006, cited the 'need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes' (Document 10765, Resolution 1481). This resolution fulfilled the 1996 resolution (Document 7209, Resolution 1096, 3 January 1996) on 'measures to dismantle the heritage of the former communist totalitarian systems'. It seems perfectly understandable that Western communist MEPs (also certain Western Socialists) were opposed to that resolution. Their vision of communism differs from Sovietism, and they had no intention of being branded with the same stigma, which would have amounted to excluding them from the democratic partisan arena. But such stigmatisation also frightened former Eastern communists, now converted to socialism and social democracy. Their current partisan legitimacy depends very directly on their moves either to escape or deny that past. There are no names of any MEPs in the United European Left or European Left group (GUE, EL) on any of the documents signed in 1996, 2003 or 2006; those documents were approved primarily by right and centre-right MEPs (EPP and EDG – European Democrat Group). Here and there we see the signature of a Socialist group member.

PACE adopted the resolution condemning the crimes of the communist system with a strong majority – final score: 99 to 42 – and most of the votes in favour

came from representatives of the former communist countries. But the move to recommend to the Committee of Ministers that the practical consequences of this condemnation be applied – an implementation decree requiring a two-thirds majority – did not pass.

These examples clearly outline the opposition between a European Union that practices normative reconciliation – the temptation to unify memory officially, as an integral part of the *acquis communautaire*, around the singularity of the Holocaust – and the will of new member states, recently emerged from the collapse of Sovietism, to get the experience of Soviet totalitarianism incorporated into the foundations of European historical legitimacy. We cannot understand this national-international scale game without analysing memory issues in formerly Sovietised Europe.

### **The heritage of the memory of communism**

*In the East, the past is being used to re-arm partisan cleavages*

The memory situation in post-communist Europe resembles one of free-floating resources. The space of memory has not yet been stabilised, and its fault lines constitute memory veins or seams offering multiple resources. Memory of the pre-communist past is appealed to primarily through opposition to communism (patriotic acts and anti-communist resistance). Since 1989 the general tendency has been 1) to check the pasts of zealous regime agents and remove anyone responsible for state crimes from any kind of power, 2) simultaneously to de-communise institutional structures, and 3) to teach the ill deeds of communism to the new generations. Policy applications, meanwhile, involve several scales of historicising action that use several operation modes and concern a panoply of different memory fields. On the institutional side there are lustration laws for people and de-communisation of structures, as well as public socialisation and information policies and systems such as archives for managing memory resources. On the side of social relations, there are citizen interactions (various victim associations), unregulated actions (organised leaks of lists of persons who collaborated with the political police); lastly, there are specialist communities and their scientific studies, as well as interference in the historical field from journalist, judge, and MP 'intruders'. In none of the post-communist countries today is there consensus on definitively closing the 'file' of the communist past. On the contrary, the impression is that with time, the importance of that past is growing in political life, on the grounds that its moral and socio-political consequences have not really been checked, resolved, or overcome.

The communist/anti-communist political cleavage does not seem as strong as it was before 1989. This is true even in the Czech Republic, where a genuine communist party has survived, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, proud of its filiation and label. In fact, the past – especially the issue of collabora-



tion with the communist regime – counts for much more than traditional political cleavages in the post-communist political system. In Germany the initial law decreed that legal procedures would be null and void after fifteen years of access to the archives, but this time limit has been extended. In some cases – the former GDR, Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic – judicialisation came early and fast; laws were quickly promulgated and institutional arrangements put in place. Elsewhere, the absolutising of consensus and compromise, the peacemaking mode negotiated at the end of the old regime, has slowed the decision-making process, namely because it has inhibited the development of clearly defined parties. It has been in the interests of political parties (rather than the transitional groups, frontists and unionists of 1989) to get involved in memory games and use historicising strategies to reawaken atrophied cleavages, even if this means intensifying dissent. However, opinions differ on the timing of these moves (too early? too late?) and on the different operation modes used. There seems no end in sight to any of the cases, and this means that the debate on how profitable such strategies are has not reached any clear conclusions. Countries who took measures relatively late – Poles, Bulgarians, Romanians, Slovaks – have each in their own way magnified the German example: to deal with their past of police persecution, the East Germans immediately (1991) passed a law opening the archives for consultation, scheduling that law to go out of effect on 21 December 2006. However, we have seen that during the debate in the Bundestag on whether or not it was necessary to extend the period for five more years (November 2006), neither the seeming perfection of the administrative system for managing the Stasi archives nor the fact that it was put in place early had the expected effects. Consider the following comment, published in the 26 November 2006 issue of the *Tageszeitung*, expressing surprise at the virulence of the debate: ‘We were further along ten years ago than we are now. At that time everyone agreed that the GDR was a dictatorship with no respect for human dignity .... Today the antitotalitarian consensus has grown porous.’

In fact, the idea that the communist past can be settled and definitively closed in the name of a healthier democracy often involves a kind of normative presupposition. The rhetoric of some of the more zealous actors, those who call for definitively turning the communist page by punishing the perpetrators of communist crimes, actually works to legitimate and promote precisely the opposite aim: keeping the memory vein productive and exploitable as long as possible. Producing ‘dissensus’ around memory is a means of guaranteeing the speakers a strong position on the partisan scene. Having archives that are not readily accessible actually works to support the deliberately maintained suspicion that those archives contain potentially inexhaustible hidden proof of the continuing existence of the enemy. Leaks – more or less planned – make people believe that reparative justice is being impeded by a network of enemy accomplices. They fuel the feeling that one enemy is hiding another: the hidden enemy – the old regime – must be protecting confidants of its former police.

*Institutional memory actors: the Office of Joachim Gauck and the Institutes of Memory*

Post-communist Europe has not chosen to imitate the Truth and Justice or Truth and Reconciliation Commissions set up on several other continents, though from time to time appeals are made to follow those examples. This is because the notion of reconciliation with the communist regime is not of much interest to the new rightist political parties, many of which are rooted in the protest against the ententes and compromises that were part of the negotiated revolutions. The argument often put forward in favour of the more disputatious option of radical lustration was that letting former agents of the regime go unpunished would endanger the newly acquired sovereignty of the country, since those agents might continue to work for a foreign power, in this case Russia. The countries most sensitive to this argument were the Baltic states and Poland. For a decade the model most admired by post-communist countries was the one conceived by the Germans of the former GDR, particularly the former dissidents, who organised street demonstrations and strikes to oppose the proposal by the German Federal Republic representative at the July 1990 reunification negotiations that the archives be destroyed as soon as possible. Since its foundation in 1992, approximately two million German citizens have come to consult their file in the renowned Office run by the former dissident pastor Joachim Gauck and now by Marianne Birthler. The specificity of the Office is that everyone has free access to their Stasi file. Several top-level politicians were unmasked as political police collaborators, though this did not hurt their political careers. But we often forget that the way of treating the East German past is not applicable in other contexts. Gauck never spoke of the biography verification process as one of de-communisation. He repeatedly stressed that SED Communist Party members and functionaries had nothing to fear. Manfred Stolpe, Social Democrat premier of the state of Brandenburg for several years, responded to revelations of his collaboration with the Stasi by saying that the East German past was a period of dishonest little compromises, and that this was a common denominator in the memory of a great number of former East German nationals. He succeeded in eliciting a general reaction of understanding, even sympathy, which then enabled him to win the federal state elections despite his past. Moreover, reunification made possible an exchange of elites: East German functionaries were simply replaced with West Germans rather than being de-communised. Finally, when the secret funding of the West German CDU party was discovered and Chancellor Helmut Kohl refused to give names, the Stasi files could have helped in the investigation, but all German political parties were against this solution, going against Gauck's own preference. *The ghosts of the past can only act if today's political actors want them to.* Would reactivating them be profitable in Germany today? Says Gauck, 'Only 20% of Germans have put the experience of the communist dictatorship behind them. Most Germans are convinced that we must not forget the abyss of civilization of the Nazi period. But no such consensus exists for the communist dictatorship.' And though the Bundestag did vote to prolong the period of accessibility to Stasi files by five years,

it also annulled the requirement to check the past of every candidate for public office, with the exception of federal government offices and a few specific categories. The official understanding is that the lustration process is fundamentally over. The several tens of thousands of positions covered by the former law have been reduced to a few dozen. Does this mean that the past can no longer serve in Germany to discredit people, and that the only historicising strategies that might be profitable now are those of reconciliation and consensus? Hardly. The law had already been passed when *Die Welt* published a sensational report claiming that Gauck's office employed about fifty specialists who were themselves former Stasi agents. Memory trouble flared up in Germany once again.

The other post-communist European countries were forced to turn to less ambitious solutions than an equivalent of the Gauck Office, with its annual budget of € 100 million and its 2200 employees in charge of 160 kilometres of files. Some of these countries – Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Romania, and at least in principle Bulgaria – have authorised entirely free access to the archives; others limited access to victims of the regime, researchers, journalists and magistrates. Almost all the countries, with the exception of the Czech Republic, founded specific institutions – institutes – for managing memory; the archives are located in these institutes. Some have archives that date from before the Second World War to 1990; they handle both totalitarianisms. In certain countries the lists of police collaborators (contested in some cases) may be consulted online (for Slovakia, on the site of the Nation's Memory Institute; for the Czech Republic, on the site of the archives of the Ministry of the Interior). Lists also circulate without institutional approval, for example, in the Czech Republic, where their purpose is to contest and supplement the official list, and in Poland, where twice now, in 1992 and 2005, they were used to pressure institutional actors and accelerate procedures for unmasking regime agents. The same is true for Hungary. In this ferment of initiatives, some countered by the powers that be, others generated by citizen movements or revelations made by victims, also by historians without regard for the presumption of innocence or journalists eager for a scoop, the actors often mistake their targets. Several persons unjustly accused of being political police collaborators have filed complaints with the European Human Rights Court in Strasbourg and some have won. In 2004, for example, the Lithuanian authorities had to pay heavy damages to two citizens whom they had removed from their jobs after accusations of collaboration. Rumours about files being used by former agents to blackmail their former victims increase the feeling of insecurity, particularly when the rumour is confirmed, as was the case in 2002 in Estonia when a Russian citizen sold the Estonian embassy in Moscow the files on four hundred previously unknown KGB agents. The principle for recruiting historians and archivists applied in the Polish and Slovakian Institutes is interesting: according to their directors, young historians were preferred over older ones who had lived under the communist regime because the young were assumed to be without emotional prejudices. The results are hardly convincing given the confusion around the aims of these

institutes and how they are regulated.<sup>7</sup> A number of young researchers have assumed the role of prosecuting attorney and descended into the partisan arena. They are insensitive to the complexity of the files. In Poland some are actually suspected of playing the game of the political parties they are close to; that is, facilitating the lustration of political enemies and keeping suspicions alive so as to compromise irreproachable political personalities who have chosen a political option different from theirs. It has been suggested, for example, that because the hero of the Polish political opposition Jacek Kuron interviewed state agent informers, as shown in their notes, he was in the process of reaching an understanding with the communist regime. Bernadetta Gronek, head archivist of the Institute of National Memory in Warsaw, irritated by questions about the young historians' impartiality, replied: 'Despite a general fear on this point, we do not employ missionary lustrators. It is true that at the outset everyone was excited about having access to the country's darkest secrets.' (*Polityka*, 5 February 2005) What is to be feared is that through the game of partisan appointments, these institutes will become little more than instruments in less than honest hands for use in political contests. This is especially likely given that Institute employees perform several functions: classification, prosecution, and evaluating individual applicants to certain administrative positions. This offers a field of action for the many *francs tireurs* of partisan historicisation out to impinge on individual destinies. History as a science is thus in danger of being reduced to the role of assistant prosecuting attorney. The media are pleased to see historians taking up this role: they like having historian-judges pulling out files and making accusations in front of their cameras instead of expounding on the context and complexity of the past. And they are particularly pleased with those who echo their own questions – Who gave the order? Who ratified it? Why haven't the criminals been punished? – while neglecting the usual precautions.

Until it is understood in Europe that the East's memory games have specific content linked to the past of the Second World War and Sovietisation, there can be no successful 'Europeanisation' of the histories of Europeans.

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<sup>7</sup> In both Slovakia and Poland a number of researchers have moved to handle 'shameful episodes' of the past, namely co-participation by Slovakian and Polish citizens in the extermination of Jews. The study by Poland's Institute of National Memory on the massacre of the Jews of Jedwabne by their Polish fellow citizens is a monumental scientific work, and on this basis it became implicated in the national debate on Polish responsibility. The study itself was conducted in reaction to a work by Jan Tomasz Gross, *Les Voisins (The Neighbours)* [2001]. It too often happens, however, that studies of the Shoah (including that of Jedwabne) are used by historians as an alibi to show that they are not obsessed with hunting down communist collaborators.

## Conclusion

Should the European Union be thought of as a space for moralising the use of historicising strategies? Are we sufficiently armed to prevent the development of systematic use of memory strategies, that is, the systematic selection of profitable metaphors and a voluntary recycling of memory intended to mobilise sensitive populations and thereby give the involved actors political weight in elections or even to develop a kind of anti-democratic weapons system? Does Europe have the ability (not to mention the vocation) to settle memory disputes once and for all? Is it in a position to impose a uniform vision of memory-related conflicts, together with a normative vision of salvation where the saviour is the EU itself?

Many politicians are inviting us to construct a great unifying narrative which would have Europe as its miraculous recipient. The most readily copied, exported and otherwise propagated European model has been to institutionalise the work of historians aimed at pacifying antagonistic histories and memories. This model, first implemented with the German-French, Polish-German, and German-Czech joint historian commissions, has enjoyed much international circulation, all the way up to the recent encounter between Chinese and Japanese historians in December 2006 (*Japan Times*, 27 December 2006). A collective study of the Chinese-Japanese case is planned for 2008; its minimal objective is to identify the facts in the wake of historical studies being done elsewhere, namely in Europe.

But rather than create a new myth, would it not be preferable to accept the plurality of historical accounts as they are, subjective as they are, together with the plurality of traumatic memories, and have them dialogue with each other?

In studying social memory-related developments in Europe, we need to look beyond the fundamental tendency to move toward reconciliation and consensus, a tendency that developed in response to the effects of exiting inter-ethnic or interstate conflicts or authoritarian regimes, beginning with the Second World War, conflicts and regimes that are still making themselves felt in the form of multiple effects in Europe. It seems to me imperative to take into account and analyse the increasing number of 'dissensus' games affecting countries engaged in constructing life after conflict and the set of countries that began exiting the authoritarian system in the 1970s.

Europe is run through and through with traces of former inter-state and inter-ethnic conflicts. Experience shows that it is always possible to reactivate those conflicts, regardless of the various ways they were resolved in the past. History readily sits itself down at the table of the present, as attested by the current mobilisations of actors, victim populations and despoiled groups who were forgotten in post-conflict arrangements or forced into silence. And on the basis of this reality, various interest groups, political parties, and states are developing memory resources and incorporating historicising strategies into their action repertoires, the aim being to 'recycle' representations of 'painful' pasts in current political issues and contests. These mobilisations then run into the reconcilia-

tion tendency that either developed spontaneously in civil society (in informal groups and NGOs, for example) or is being steered by national and international institutions. That tendency is becoming increasingly routine, due among other things to the circulation of 'good' models for pacifying resentment, models often strongly normative in tone. Anyone wishing to push forward the construction of Europe and improve the way institutions handle post-conflict situations must reckon with all these phenomena, constituent components of the axiological reality of the European space.

Translated from the French by Amy Jacobs

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